Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Carl Madsen
Date of Interview: March 2, 2000
Location of Interview: Shepherdstown, WV
Interviewer: Mark Madison

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 37 years (1967- 2004)

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Wetland and Habitat biologist, Division of River Basin Studies, Fergus Falls, Minnesota; GS 7, 9, 11 Wetlands Office, Devils Lake, North Dakota; Wisconsin Wildlife Enhancement Office, Stevens Point, Wisconsin; Wildlife Biologist, Region 3; Migratory Birds Program Mid-Continent Mallard Management Unit; GS 13, Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

Most Important Projects: Private Lands Program

Colleagues and Mentors: Bob Stewart Sr., Lucille Stickel,

Most Important Issues: Egg programs; Predator Management to help increase nests; wetland destruction of prairies

Brief Summary of Interview: Mr. Madsen grew up knowing he wanted to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service after reading an issue of the Weekly Reader. He would do research as a student at the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center before joining the Service in 1967. He worked with the Service during several reorganizations, and is known as the father of the Private Lands Program. He talks about the various positions he held and offices he worked at, noting the he knew working at the Regional Office wasn't his cup of tea, programs started, and issues that he faced.

Keywords: USFWS employee, history, biography, wetlands, biologist, military, habitats, land acquisition, nest, predators, Farm Act of 1985, restoration, easements, crops, waterfowl.

Mark Madison:
This is Mark Madison, the Service Historian on March 2, 2000 at NCTC in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, and today, I'm conducting an oral history with Carl Madson, M-a-d-s-o-n.

Carl Madsen:
s-e-n

Mark Madison:
s-e-n, I'm sorry. M-a-d-s-e-n, and then, Carl, the first question for you would be when and how did you enter the Service?

Carl Madsen:
Well, I began as a student at Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center in the spring of 1965. I worked for Bob Stewart, Bob Stewart, Sr., not Jr. and Harold <unclear> who were doing a wetland classification study. I worked with them there for the summer, then stayed on until January 1, then did some research for my graduate work back at Michigan State University. I went back to the University and then came back and was hired by the Service full-time in September of 1967 and went to Fergus Falls, Minnesota as a Wetland Habitat Biologist. At that time, we called it WHP, whips. We were in the Division of River Basin Studies, and we did a lot of the work surrounding the wetland destruction of the prairies. In fact, I remember, the Department of Agriculture was still paying for a subsidized drainage of wetlands and were providing technical assistance to drain. Even before that, back to my earliest recollection,

I suppose at age four or five as a youngster, and I want to say living in Wisconsin and not growing up, because I've never grown up and don't ever intend to grow up.

Mark Madison:
Where in Wisconsin?

Carl Madsen:
In Racine County, southeast Wisconsin.

Mark Madison:
I'm from Wausau personally.

Carl Madsen:
I went to school in Stevens Point, and I've been to Wausau a few times. So anyway, we lived kind of on the edge of town, and we could never figure out if we had a small farm or a big garden, but next to that was a nice wetland and small woods, and I spent an inordinate amount of my time there even as a pre-schooler and all the way through my grade years and so forth, and there was a time, and I don't remember what grade I was in, maybe about sixth grade or something, remember the old Weekly Readers?

Mark Madison:
Oh, yeah.

Carl Madsen:
There was an article on that Weekly Reader about going north to Van Dyne, had this crew of the Fish and Wildlife Service going north, and I read that thing, and I kept that thing until it was wore out to nothing, and I said, "That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to work for that outfit." I think that, so I've known what I wanted to do ever since grade school.

Mark Madison:
That's great.

Carl Madsen:
And known about the Agency since then from the Weekly Reader. About, would have been about 1980, there was an old guy in Minnesota who, he said, one day he said, "Here, I just found this going through some stuff." He said, "I thought you'd like to have it." It was a copy of that Weekly Reader from 1950.

Mark Madison:
Wonderful.

Carl Madsen:
And going north to Van Dyne, and I said, "Well, it's probably not safe in my hands." I sent it down to Patuxent to the Migratory Bird Office. I don't know whatever became of it, but sometime in 1950 that Weekly Reader was out there, and I came across it again. I says, "Yeah, this means something to me."

Mark Madison:
That's great. Did the Service live up to your expectations?

Carl Madsen:
I'd do it all over again. So what's this, 2000, and I started in '67, so next fall will be 33 years full-time with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Mark Madison:
Wow!

Carl Madsen:
If you put the military time, and I had a little time with the Forest Service and with the temporary time in the northern prairie, I think I have over 36 years right now. I could retire, but it's still fun. I look forward to going to work every day, and I have since the day I started. I wake up in the morning, and I'm anxious to get going, get to work, and maybe to a fault. So there's the old saying, and maybe I'm guilty of that, "if you are what you do, what are you when you don't," and there's a little bit of fear I have of leaving this job and, because I've become this job and, but I have a lot of other interests, and I'll do fine when I do decide to retire.

Mark Madison:
Sure.

Carl Madsen:
The thing I like now is there's a lot of bright, young people coming in and I can kind of give them the experience of the years and let them do the heavy lifting and heavy learning, and let them get going, and we really do attract a lot of bright, young people.

I'm glad I'm not competing with them today for a job, because they're really, that part is really increased over the years. I think when I first started in the Fish and Wildlife Service, it was basically all white males. I don't know of any women that were in the field. We had women secretaries and that sort of thing.

Mark Madison:
Yeah.

Carl Madsen:
I started in Region 3, and I met Lucille Stickler early on, and I see her pictures on the wall up there.

Mark Madison:
She's a hero here.

Carl Madsen:
Yeah, and other than Lucille, I'm sure there were some women in the field. I didn't know them, I never saw them, and it was all males, and all white males. I never saw a minority. Of course, that's changed, and not probably changing fast enough, but it is changing, and every time I see some of our people over there talking about, it's still, where are we going with this and how fast will we ever get to where we are. It's an interesting process and kind of exciting to see that change and to see people with other attitudes coming in, picking up, and learning the business. That's kind of nice.

Mark Madison:
How did your career go from Fergus Falls? Where did you go after that?

Carl Madsen:
Remember we said we were in River Basin Studies in wetlands and that was a division that was mostly, that is now Ecological Services Division, River Basins were, and they were doing studies with the Corps of Engineers in the mid-west. They're doing the big dams in the Missouri River and that sort of thing, which they were working on, and we were doing wetlands working with, for, and against Department of Agriculture in their drainage efforts and others who would drain, and remember

that in 1962, the Accelerated Wetland Acquisition Program was authorized, where we spent our Duck Stamps for, quite a small, Duck Stamp proceeds for acquiring small wetlands, primarily in the prairies, and the goal there was to buy the nucleus brood areas, acquire some other wetlands around it with easements, and then fill in the other opportunities on private lands with whatever we could. Well, we got going real good with the acquisition program, and if you look back on that today, now some nearly, what, 40 years later, it's got to stand as a monument that's never been equaled in the conservation field probably anywhere in the world. I mean, there's been hundreds of millions of dollars spent to buy land. We've bought hundreds of thousands of acres of land and hundreds of thousands of acres of easements, and it continues to move forward. But we were very slow at getting started in the private lands pickups in between that, and that was my realm from early on. I've never been a game warden, never been a refuge manager, always been kind of out there trying to do what we can without a budget, without authority, without legislation, and we were able to do a few things, but it was a pretty slow step. I think people who wanted to do something, we sometimes found a way to do it. From Fergus Falls, I spent two years there, and then in 1969, I moved to the Wetlands Office in Devil's Lake and spent three years there, and grade-wise, I started, I came out of Michigan State with a Master's Degree and started as a GS-7, which was for the unheard of salary of $6400 a year, a tremendous deal.

Mark Madison:
That's the current historian's salary.

Carl Madsen:
Yeah, right. But that tremendous grade and tremendous pay, I mean, it was a plum job. A lot of guys were going out then at $5,000 and even less, and to start at $6400 was really great and, but you could buy a new car then for $2500 or $3,000. You could buy a house for $15,000, a nice house, and you could rent a house for $100 a month, so it's all relative, and if you take that and from where we went there, then that was one year as a 7, one year as a 9, and then I went to 11, and then I was an 11 then for three years in Devil's Lake, and then I moved to Wisconsin, and that was at the time when Region 3 and Region 6 split, when they split Region 6 off of the other regions, and so the Dakota's became part of Region 6, and I moved then to what we

call the Wildlife Enhancement Office in Wisconsin, and I went to Stevens Point. There was no office there. There was nothing there. I arrived there with a clipboard and a pencil, and they said "do your best to find office space," and I did have a government car that I brought with me, and I moved a government desk with me, and I got an office from the University. Dan Trainer was the Dean of the School of Natural Resources there and just gave me free office space, and I remember, we had to go through GSA, and I told him, well if GSA can get a better deal I'll take it, but this one's good, so we had our office there for awhile. I only lasted there a year, and then they, of all things, they reorganized in the Regional Office again. This was about the second reorganization since I'd been there. Maybe third, because we had gone from River Basins, and then we had the old Predator and Rodent Control Division, and they became known as Wildlife Services then to enhance their image and name, and they moved the wetlands biologists into Wildlife Services, and it gave them a little balance and a little more diversified mission, and that caused a little consternation. I think there was a little bit of pushing and shoving on egos around who was, who wore the top hat there and so forth, and it was, it was kind of interesting time to be there then, and so I moved from there then to Wisconsin and started that office, and then we reorganized again, and they had a division called Planning and Assistance in the Regional Office, and that was federal aid fish hatcheries and our <unclear> control in Region 3 was in there, and they had a Wildlife Biologist and a Fishery Biologist Enhancement section, and now we were under that division as were our field people. So I took the wildlife biologist position there. That didn't last long, and they reorganized that way again, and I worked in various places and mostly in the Migratory Bird Program with the Migratory Bird Coordinator, and then we had the, they called it the Mid-Continent Mallard Management Unit, which included all of the lake states and the prairie pothole states and the Province of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and that, at that time, was called the Mid-Continent Mallard Management Unit. The people, the wildlife managers there, were concerned about declining mallard populations from that part of the county, and this group met, and it had some high powered people that met for a number of years, and one of our meetings was when Jack Kemp was the Regional Director in Region 3 at the time, and if anyone knows Jack, you know he was a little bit gruff and direct.

Mark Madison:

He came out here for the retiree weekend reunion.

Carl Madsen:
Great guy.

Mark Madison:
Very nice guy.

Carl Madsen:
Great guy, and he says, well, words to the effect, like, "I'm tired of hearing all this talk." He says, "Here's $100,000, two FTE's, go do something someplace." He says, "You guys decide wherever you want to go," and he left the room, and after a lot of discussion, it was decided that they would put these two positions in Fergus Falls and hire two people to go out and see what they could do on the land, and we kind of decided that what was needed was filling in some habitat on those private lands between what we were already doing with the Acquisition Program. I was selected for that position. That was a Grade 13, and when I left Stevens Point and came into the Regional Office, I was a 12. I was there for five years and then went on as a 13 and continue as a 13 to this day, so I've been a 13 for more than 20 years, which is fine with me. And so we did that count and stuff there for 10 years, and we worked within the egg programs and tried to tickle a few changes there and worked with the legislative process and the various farm bills, got our foot in the door here and there. We tried some predator management to increase nest success. We did some habitat developments on private lands, but again, really without a budget, and we scrounged money from wherever we could through whatever partnerships we had, and it was in the mid-80's, the early '80's where Ducks Unlimited formed their field office in Bismarck, North Dakota, and they joined us then with funding and with engineering services to do projects. That kind of jump started the Private Lands Program, which we were doing in three counties in western Minnesota, wetland restorations, grassland restorations. We had some other funding that came to us then from the Service, and we started to do these things, and then when the '85 Farm Act was passed, the Service was given a role in that, and it took us a couple of years to get in gear, and we started private lands coordinators in each region, and I think Region 3 was the first one to do that, because I was called in there to help set that up in the Regional office, and we

named an individual to be the Farm Bill Coordinator in each state, and I mean, that was in 1987, and then people started getting going with doing various things in various states around the country, but probably in the prairie states jumped out ahead of that first. North Dakota comes to mind as one that got pretty aggressive there because of some of our people that were really innovative and jumped on this quickly, and so the Private Lands Program now was going, what we now call Partners for Fish and Wildlife. It started off being called Partners for Wildlife, which was a good name. It didn't reflect any agency. It didn't reflect what we did. It just reflected that it was a partners program. It wasn't, because in one part of the country we might do wetland restoration, another part we might do tree restoration, another part grassland restoration, and whatever. When they changed it to Partners for Fish and Wildlife, I was a little dismayed about that, because I consider wildlife to include fish. I consider wildlife to include insects, amphibians, reptiles, and if we say partners for Fish and Wildlife, I look on that as a division more than a unity thing, which is what it was intended for, and should we have a Partners for Wildlife, a Partners for Fish and Wildlife, or a Partners for Fish, Wildlife, Insects, Amphibians, Reptiles and compartmentalize all those, or Partners for Wildlife was a more umbrella term. Also, when you say Partners for Fish and Wildlife, it's almost like you're bringing the Agency name in there, and when you're selling and you're first meeting someone and you want them to join Partners for Fish and Wildlife, it's like asking them to jump in bed with the Fish and Wildlife Service. On the prairies that's not a real, it's a big leap for someone to do that, and so if you have just this Partners for Wildlife, wildlife was already a leap for them, and so I hope we go back to Partners for Wildlife someday.

Mark Madison:
Let's talk about that a minute, because you spent most of your career in the mid-west, it sounds like.

Carl Madsen:
Yes, yes.

Mark Madison:

Did you see changing perceptions about the Fish and Wildlife Service over the 33 years, and has it been a tough sell?

Carl Madsen:
Really, really not. I can go off almost any place in the Dakotas right now, western Minnesota, and the Fish and Wildlife Service is usually not held in high esteem by farmers and ranchers. They fear endangered species. They fear regulation of wetlands. They don't like land acquisition because it takes land off the tax rolls and removes land that they might buy. But the other side of that is they love land acquisition when they want to sell land. They complain about our easements, but when they need some cash, they love our easements, and they take our cash. We're doing more easement work in South Dakota now than we have ever done.

Mark Madison:
Sure.

Carl Madsen:
And we've got more people lined up at the door to get in the program than we have dollars for, and we have more dollars now than we've ever had, and so they say well they don't like it, but still they come in, they like to do business with us, but they don't like us, and one thing that I found the same now as the same then is the Agency, as a group, is perceived as an outsider someplace. It's this big, bad brother thing. One farmer, many years ago, told me, he says, "We used to hate you guys until we got to know you," and I think that was the hallmark of the Private Lands Program. It's a one on one thing. Our relations, in the agricultural community are very personal. They're one on one. People buy their machinery from someone they know. They sell their grain to someone they know. Typically they buy their vehicles from someone they know, and they do it very personally. They don't respond well to postcards or mailing things or television ads and just send off and do it. You've got to get to know them personally, and that's been a hallmark of the Private Lands Program, also of the Wetland Acquisition Program. The appraisers that have been out buying land have established a very personal relationship with the people they have worked with and, but still it's not, it's only a minority of people that we've worked with, but almost all of them, once we've worked with them, are friends and

allies, although they don't go to bat for you on everything. Endangered species is a very hard sell out there yet, and there's a strong property rights feelings and private ownership of property and any threats that are perceived to be pretty serious.

Mark Madison:
Yeah, those are always problems with farmers and ranchers. Is there some places of conservation, though, you do find common ground with farmers? Is it easier to get them to agree to, for example, to waterfowl propagation or something?

Carl Madsen:
Our easiest sell is if we're working with livestock operators. We have grass. They value grass, they need grass for livestock grazing and for hay, and they also need water in conjunction with that grass, and that's really what the prairie and wildlife is about is water and grass. That's our easiest sell is to restore or develop wetlands and improve or restore or protect the grasslands on which livestock graze, and that's a very compatible common ground thing that's throughout the Dakotas. There is a growing trend toward more grow crops and less diversified agriculture, less livestock in the eastern Dakotas. I think North Dakota is probably further advanced in that than South Dakota is, and I've never been able to figure out exactly why. But as the farms get larger, there is less livestock. There is more interest in rural crops as opposed to small grain and hay and the diversification farming. There's more pressure on removing obstacles like wetlands and grasslands and other habitats, and that trend has been growing slowly over the years, and I've seen it, for example, in 1970, there were almost no soybeans in northwest Minnesota and in South Dakota, the whole state of South Dakota. Today we have over 4,000,000 acres of soybeans in South Dakota, and that's made a big impact on land use and farms are big and getting bigger. I've seen that over the years, too. People buy out their neighbor and others. One farmer, where there used to be two, and those trends are going on. I was visiting with a farmer the other day. He says, he's retired now, he says, "When we got married in 1954," he says, "there was 24 farmers in our township, active farmers." He says, "Today there are two." So each of them has 18 square miles that they're farming and ranching on. There's only two left in the whole township, and so that's, that trend of fewer people to work with, and the bigger guys, when the bigger guys go

to real crops, it's a tough sell, and they set up for more conflicts which we continue to be in.

Mark Madison:
Do you think the wetlands are in better shape now or worse shape than when you started?

Carl Madsen:
Worse. While we can point to the successes that we've had in acquisition and preservation, the bottom line is there are fewer wetlands totally in the landscape now than there was when I started. I guess I should feel bad about that, but I too often rejoice about the good parts that have taken place during my watch, and even though we restore some, it's still a drop in the bucket compared to what we have drained in my time, and it's, the whole world has changed, and I remember when I used to come in when I first started and the guys would talk about 20 or 25 years ago, and we're talking now from 1965, take 25 years before that, that was 1940, and there were guys working there that were on the ground doing things and talking about what ducks were like. I said, "Boy, it would have been great to work at that time." I see myself now talking with the young guys coming in, what things were like 25 or 30 years ago, most of them weren't even born then, and to tell them what duck hunting was like then. They say, "Boy, those were the good old days." But there are parts of the good old days and the good times that are here now, at least in waterfowl population increase we've had. I've never seen ducks on the prairies in my lifetime like we have now, and that's rewarding to see.

Mark Madison:
How do you explain that if the wetlands are declining? Why do you think that the numbers are going up in waterfowl?

Carl Madsen:
You know, I'm not sure if everybody would agree with me, but I have never been able to correlate well the numbers of wetlands on the U.S. prairies with the numbers of ducks, and we know we've got less habitat now than we had in 1955 when the surveys were started. We know we have less wetlands now than we had in 1970's, in

the mid-'70's when we had high duck populations, and we have just as high populations now. But I think there's probably, when you drive through the countryside, you see a lot of water standing in places for a short time that most people probably don't even count as wetlands. There's a lot of wetlands that are out there that are now larger than they were. I think there's a lot of birds breeding in places north of the traditional prairie breeding grounds that have been wet and have been favorable to breed. So it's hard to say everything, and it's hard to defend with the public when we say we've got so many acres of less wetlands than we used to have, and yet we have this high duck population. There's never been a good correlation. I don't know if it's the way we count ducks or the way we count wetlands or if there is no correlation between it. It's something that is a little troubling.

Mark Madison:
Then how do you sell it, because I mean, that's really been a big chunk of your career is accumulating wetlands?

Carl Madsen:
You bet, you bet, but I think it is, I can only deal with one at a time. I can only restore one at a time. I can only be concerned with that one that's going to be lost today, and I know, I know that if the Dakotas look like north central Iowa and southern Minnesota which used to be pothole country, I can go there and there are no ducks there. I mean, flat out, no ducks. Well, the people in Iowa would choke me for that, because there are some ducks, but I remember, I worked for Grady Mann in 1967. He was, he was the Wetland Supervisor. We were at a pond in northwest Minnesota in the evening with spying scopes, and there was about eight or ten broods in this large wetland. Now, coming from Wisconsin and recently out of Michigan State University, I was drooling over seeing eight or ten broods in one pond, and this was a large pond, and Grady says, "Well, in 1950, I sat right here on this hill with a spying scope, and I counted 125 broods," and I couldn't imagine that. I go back now to the young people there, and if they see two or three broods of ducks, they get excited, and we don't even dare to think in terms of 125 broods in a pond anymore. In some places we've seen it in recent years. We've seen numbers like have been reported in the good old days. So ducks have responded somehow because of all this water around there but it's tough. If the ducks are there, you seem to see them. I'm

not sure if our counting is right or what, but there's ducks out there, and that part is rewarding.

Mark Madison:
Let me wrap it up with where we started. You said you entered Fish and Wildlife through the Weekly Reader and, you know, it seemed like an interesting career. What sustained you for 33 years? Was it the animals themselves, or did you have good colleagues, or you know, something has to keep you going for 33 years?

Carl Madsen:
Well, I've always felt a dedication to the resource and to migratory birds and their habitat and many other things out there in the diversity of it, earthworms and bugs and the whole works, and the whole system is always fascinating, but the people you work with day in and day out, I've had some great people to work with and work for, and I can't say that it's been every one. There have been a few clinkers along, and there has been a few people I didn't particularly like, and I'm sure there's people that didn't like me. We didn't appreciate each other, maybe I should say that rather than like or dislike. I've never been in fist cuffs with anybody, but maybe we've had a less appreciation. I've also liked the freedom that the Service has given me to work, work out and fulfill my dreams and visions and reward me for what I've done. I've liked the idea that I've been able to guide my career to go where I want, even though there have been pressures to go in the Regional Office and move up or to go to the Washington Office, and I did have a stint in the Regional Office for awhile, and I knew that wasn't my bag. I did not do well there, in my estimation, and I was happy to get back out in the country where I could do real things with real people. I have steadfastly refused to go to Washington. I had a directed transfer one time and did not take it and was still able to save my appointment, but that's another story. I've had, what I consider to be, fair pay raises and the financial remuneration and the Federal benefits have always been good for me and my family. I've always felt well paid for what I did. Other rewards and awards they give you, I mean, I've got the Meritorious Service Award in the Department. I've got a number of other lesser awards, the Civil Servant of the Year Award, that kind of thing. They kind of have a way of encouraging you through the awards program, and well, you can say, well that's no big deal, but I remember a time when you got an incentive award and you

were given $200 for doing something, and when you were making less than $10,000, that was a big deal. You could almost take your family on vacation for awhile, you know, and we continue to do those things, and I think that's positive. I like the interaction that we have between supervisors and employees in the Fish and Wildlife Service. It's not a militaristic, direct, a lot of directives, do this, do that, you must have this by that time. It's more of a large team in the real sense, and I'm here at the Training Center doing impact, which is all about teams and everything, and someone said, "Well, gees, where did you start?" I said, "I was on the Wetlands Habitat Team." "You mean they had teams way back then?" I said, "Yeah, I guess we didn't know they were teams, but we had them." So I've come full circle with it. Retirement, I don't know, not anytime soon, I'm still having fun.

Mark Madison:
That's a good way to end, because we don't want to lose you. Thank you very much, Carl.